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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the work of Ransom A. Mackie, a scholar and instructor in Massachusetts under the mentorship of G. Stanley Hall, the prominent adolescent psychologist. Mackie published a book in 1920 which, along with further writings, outlines a cooperative learning strategy. Performance-based education and authentic assessment proponents could benefit from the use of Mackie's work. Mackie divides the strategy into the six roles of leader, critic, chairperson, class, teacher, and secretary. The paper outlines the role expectations for each of these members and describes the benefits to be gained from the shared learning experience of the group. The strategy is designed to encourage active participation, stimulate initiative and originality, correct misinformation, develop the ability to communicate, expand experiences, build knowledge, and offer students the opportunity to think, reason, judge, and make decisions. (EH)

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A STRATEGY FROM THE PAST IN COOPERATIVE LEARNING

STILL USEFUL TODAY

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A Strategy From the Past in Cooperative Learning Still Useful Today

Ransom A. Mackie was a scholar and instructor at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, during the early nineteen hundreds. Clark's president, G. Stanley Hall, the prominent adolescent psychologist, became Mackie's mentor. In 1920, with an introduction written by Hall, Mackie published a book which was based, in part, on Hall's philosophy and psychology of education (Mackie 1920, iii - xv). By the late twenties, Mackie had become a professor at the State Normal College in Dillon, Montana. During the teens and twenties, Mackie published numerous articles on the curriculum and instruction of the upper elementary and secondary grades. Many of these articles and his book include a strategy in cooperative learning still useful today. Performance-based education and authentic assessment make Mackie's approach to cooperative learning especially timely. Teachers may want to incorporate this strategy into some of their daily lesson plans.

Mackie states that a shared learning experience can lead to

the development of all students through the leadership of the class and the teacher. Mackie's strategy encourages active participation, stimulates initiative and originality, corrects misinformation, develops the ability to communicate, expands experiences, builds knowledge, and gives students the opportunity to think, reason, judge, and make decisions (Mackie 1920, 153-54). Mackie subdivides his strategy into the six roles of leader, critic, chairperson, class, teacher, and secretary.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

The teacher divides a reading assignment or selection into several different parts and assigns a student leader and a student critic or reactor to each part. Leaders prepare questions and answers over each of their different sections of the reading selection. They also find additional information in other primary and secondary sources. Visuals are collected or developed to accompany the research topics. Though leaders have as their primary function the job of quizzing the class, they must also supplement their sections with the information and visuals gained from their collateral readings and research (Mackie 1928a, 34).

Mackie suggests that teachers instruct their students on how to prepare their readings for presentation. The first reading of a primary or secondary source should be done quickly. The second reading should be done critically and deliberately. After each paragraph students should think about what they have read. They should find the topic sentence of the paragraph. Next, they should find each of the subordinate thoughts, and they should examine the thoughts for how they contribute to the meaning of the topic sentence. Next, they should connect the ideas in any one paragraph with the ideas in each of the preceding paragraphs. Notes should be short summaries of the main ideas, yet they should be clear and definite enough so as to be of use to the student while speaking to the class. Student prepared questions over the readings should begin, for the most part, with the words show, compare, contrast, explain, point out, prove or disprove, why or give reasons, give causes and results, or advance arguments for or against, though some questions can begin with the words who, what, when, tell, give, or name (Mackie 1928b, 173-74).

During discussion, leaders use the topics in their section of the reading assignment to question their classmates. Volunteers are called upon only after two other students have

attempted to answer a question. Students discuss each question to the greatest extent possible. Thereafter, leaders offer their additional information and visuals (Mackie 1928a, 34).

THE ROLE OF THE CRITIC

Critics outline their part of the reading assignment. They use the subdivisions of their sentence outline to take notes on collateral reading and to gather visuals. The collateral reading is used to give the class ideas not already found in their reading assignment. Critics also write questions from their part of the lesson for the purpose of quizzing the class. They quiz their classmates either in rotation with the leader or as a follow-up to the questions asked by the leader, should the leader fail to cover any part of the lesson deemed essential by the critic. The critic's primary function, though, is to react favorably or unfavorably to the responses of their classmates to the questions of the leader. They also supplement the discussion with their outside reading and visuals, and, if asked to do so, they summarize their part of the lesson (Mackie 1928a, 34).

THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON

Before the activity begins, students have their names put on cards, one name per card. The student chairperson uses these cards to call on students to respond to questions and to participate in discussion. At the beginning of the activity, the chairperson calls on the first leader to come forward to quiz the class. The student whose name appears on the top card responds first. If the student responds satisfactorily, the card goes to the bottom of the stack. If the person responds poorly, the card goes back into the stack somewhere near the top of the pile so that the student will soon have another chance at answering another question before too much time passes. In the event the first student responds poorly, the cards are used again, and the person whose name appears on the second card is asked to respond. Volunteers can respond after two students have made an attempt to answer the question. Discussion of the question comes next. At the end of the discussion, the chairperson calls on either the critic or the student secretary to summarize the essentials of the discussion.

Attention returns to the leader and a second question is asked. The chairperson uses the cards to call on the next two

students. If the responses of the two students do not satisfy either the leader or the class, the chairperson may call upon any of the volunteers to either correct errors or to offer additional information. Discussion of the question follows as does a summation of the essentials of the discussion by either the critic or the secretary (Mackie 1928a, 34).

THE ROLE OF THE CLASS

Students answer the questions of the leaders and the critics. They also ask questions. They can ask questions to clarify a point under discussion, or they can ask questions to bring out new information. Students who have done collateral reading volunteer to present their information and visuals to the class. After a report, speakers quiz the class over their talks. During the discussion that follows, speakers are cross-examined by the class and made to either defend, modify, or abandon their position depending upon the arguments presented by their classmates. Students must speak clearly and forcefully and with purpose and precision. As a follow-up, leaders use their collateral reading to offer additional information.

The class becomes an open forum; the teacher allows the

students to express themselves freely. Students pool their knowledge, and cooperate in the sharing of information. Each person becomes important in the success of the group. Likewise, the group takes interest in the success of each person. Students take responsibility for the conduct of the lesson; initiative and self-reliance are enhanced.

Conversations and discussions take place among the students rather than between the teacher and the students. Discussions, questions, and criticisms are transferred to the class as a whole. Students notice most of the needed corrections. Discussion and criticism remain constructive, and teachers advise their students to avoid seeing only the adverse side of a fellow student's efforts (Mackie 1928a, 34).

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Teachers act as guides, judges, and critics. They address the class or answer their own questions only after their students have had a chance to present their views. They encourage their students to express themselves, to ask questions, and to use their collateral readings and visuals to add interest to the lesson. Should students fail to bring out an essential point,

the teacher uses a question to correct for the oversight (Mackie 1928a, 34). In fact, the teacher prepares several thought questions in advance of the lesson for the purpose of making sure that the main points are given extra attention. Any particular question should create a need in the student to think for a few moments before responding. Likewise, questions should result in a response that adds something new and different to the discussion. Fact questions (who, what, when) are acceptable, but questions calling for reason and judgment (prove or disprove, argue for or against) are preferable. A few good questions are usually best for the purpose of the activity (Mackie 1929, 108-9).

Besides quizzing the class, the teacher corrects errors and criticizes responses both favorably and unfavorably. On occasion, students will make statements that are not true, and the class will fail to correct the error, or a student will express an opinion, but then fail to support the opinion with facts. As necessary, the teacher intervenes, but only as a last resort. In addition to correcting errors and criticizing responses, the teacher supplements the work of the students with outside reading and other visuals. The teacher adds ideas to the discussion not already found in the reading assignment. These

ideas are added only after the students have had a chance to add their information.

Teachers stimulate student interest, individuality, and originality. They encourage their students to express different viewpoints and to accept for consideration the criticism of their classmates. Rather than dictate, teachers direct and counsel their students; they advise and lead them. The teacher acts as the final authority on any question that cannot be answered by the class. Having discussed the question with the class, the teacher resumes the position of on-looker. The physical and mental activity of the class remain undisturbed. To be of most help, the teacher needs to be able to cite subject matter and library references. At the end of the lesson or unit, the teacher holds a final debriefing session for the purpose of having the students discuss and evaluate their experiences with the activity (Mackie 1928a, 34-35).

THE ROLE OF THE SECRETARY

Student secretaries should show good judgment, initiative, and the ability to express themselves in a clear and concise manner; they should be verbal and analytical. Following the

discussion of an important topic, the secretary presents a summary of the main points and conclusions. Additional study might be indicated.

On occasion, a question will develop that cannot be settled at the time of the discussion. Students could be given an extra day or two to conduct further research. Mackie gives the example of a student who, during a discussion, stated that the British government was more democratic than the American government. Students took sides, but were unable to come to a conclusion. Over the next two days, students gathered evidence to either prove or disprove that the British government was more democratic than the American government. On the third day, the students held a debate on the subject (Mackie 1928a, 35). In another example, students used an interdisciplinary approach to gain information about the Renaissance period. A teacher asked his students to prove through their collateral reading that the Renaissance was a period of tremendous change in Europe from about the middle of the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century in painting, language and literature, science and invention, discovery and exploration, education, and religion. Students selected different categories to investigate. They used the same basic outline for each category: Old

conditions (Middle Ages), Defects of the old conditions, Problem to be solved (prove the change during the Renaissance), Events or what happened, and Favorable or unfavorable results. Having researched the problem, the students discussed each of the different categories separately.

Students discussed paintings first. They began with the art of the Middle Ages. One student said that all of the paintings were frescoes done on plaster walls. Their purpose was for the salvation of the soul of the beholder; beauty was not a major purpose. Another student said that the paintings were conventionalized Byzantine imitations. Artists showed little knowledge of anatomy, proportion, perspective, or distance. Another student explained the symbolic nature of the depictions found in the paintings. In the next phase of the discussion, students compared the paintings of the Middle Ages with the paintings of the Renaissance. Students included information on Giotto, Da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Holbein, Rubens, and Rembrandt. To conclude the discussion, a student summed up the value of these painters to modern art.

Students discussed the categories of language and literature, science and invention, discovery and exploration, education, and religion in much the same manner as they had

discussed paintings. In language and literature, they included information on Dante, Froissart, Chaucer, Valla, Colet, Erasmus, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Cervantes, and Shakespeare. In science and invention, they discussed the contributions of Gutenberg, Copernicus, Servetus, Galileo, Kepler, Harvey, and Newton. In discovery and exploration, they brought out research on Marco Polo, Diaz, Columbus, Pizzaro, Balboa, Magellan, Cortez, Cartier, Raleigh, and De Soto. In education, they included Reuchlin, Erasmus, Sturm, Luther, Mclanchthon, Zwingli, Calvin, Rabelais, Mulcaster, and Montaigne. And in religion, they examined the philosophies of Wyclif, Huss, Goch, Savonarola, Luther, Loyola, Calvin, Cranmer, and Knox (Mackie 1920, 165-72).

Teachers interested in performance-based education and authentic assessment may want to incorporate some of Mackie's ideas into their daily lesson plans. As a Clark University scholar, public school teacher, normal school professor, and protégé of G. Stanley Hall, Mackie was instrumental during the early nineteen hundreds in the development of a strategy in cooperative learning. Some aspects of his strategy may still be of interest to teachers today.

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